

## CHAPTER 1

### NWAGU ANEKE: THE MAN, THE SCRIPT AND THE MESSAGE

#### A. PREAMBLE

The phenomenon of Nwagu Aneke is one that merits interest and study. Here is someone who has never been to school even for a day and yet he has written an intense and extensive body of messages. The script in which he writes these messages is all his own and he claims <sup>that it</sup> was taught to him by ndi mmọ, the community of ancestral and non-ancestral spirits. The message insists on a comprehensive new awareness based on a genuine progression from ancient traditions.

I met Nwagu Aneke for the first time in July 1983. I was then the Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria and he was brought to me by an amateur ethnographer, Mazi Ike Manafa of Aguleri, who thought that the University should be interested in this phenomenon of a man who had never been to school and who could write and read in a script that had nothing to do with what we had learnt at school.

When I met Nwagu Aneke, he had had some mild exposure in the newspapers, he had spoken once or twice on the radio and appeared on television, but he was still relatively unknown - a strange and interesting phenomenon that could not be accommodated into any system of knowledge or learning or cultural development. He excited a large measure of interest in me. I had him read passages from two of his exercise books. I had the readings recorded on tape and also made photocopies of the four passages from which he had read.

I could see a semblance of regularity in the use of symbols and I further tested this by asking him to write from dictation. At first he read what he had written and it was his dialect phonemes for the words spoken. I insisted that he reproduce the exact sounds that I had used. What he read the next time was much more accurate to the sounds that I had pronounced. Ultimately, I asked him to write his name beside my own. This was how I learnt the first three units of the Nwagu Aneke script as follows

Nwagụ =      Nwọga =      Therefore nwa =      agụ =      ọga =

In spite of the interest which the experience of meeting Nwagụ Aneke aroused in me and the various questions that it raised, I really did not do much further in exploration of the phenomenon. I had some research assistants transcribe the tapes of the readings into the standard Igbo orthography. By placing the transcription side by side with the photocopies of the script, I was able to confirm that the script had consistency. But it was not till May 1988, nearly five years after our <sup>first</sup> meeting, <sup>that</sup> I started writing the first essay on the work of Nwagụ Aneke, and even that was in response to a request by Dr. Chukwuma Azuonye, then editor of *The Nsukka Journal of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages*.

I believe that it is no coincidence that, as I was finishing that article in June 1988, somebody came to my office to say that someone from his town had been asking for me. When I asked who it was, it turned out to be Nwagụ Aneke. I wrote a letter to Nwagụ Aneke and gave him a date on which I would visit him in his village. For some official engagement I was not able to go that day. But before the day was out, Nwagụ Aneke had arrived at Nsukka. He had understood that he was to come that day - which meant that if I had gone that day as I proposed I would not have met him at home.

It would appear that I was now ready for Nwagụ Aneke. Since June 1988 when we renewed contact I have tape-recorded twenty-three ninety-minute cassettes of his readings. It was fortunate and providential that we did this because he became completely blind in February 1989. I have had operations done to the eyes but he had not started using the eyes for effective reading before preparations for this book were completed. I have done a video-recording of him reading his books and engaged in discussion with my academic colleagues from various disciplines. I have had scholars in the linguistics discipline investigate his script in <sup>order</sup> other to relate it to other scripts that have been invented in Africa and elsewhere. I have had transcriptions done of the readings.

There were times when I had to change my plans under the pressure of whatever urgency was operating for Nwagụ Aneke. For example, soon after our new spate of work, on Wednesday, 22nd of June, 1988, about 9.30 in the morning as I was preparing to travel out of town, unexpectedly, ~~Mazi~~ <sup>Ogburn</sup> Nwagụ Aneke arrived. He was carrying what I thought then was the whole bag of his materials and feeling very much under pressure to work on communicating his material. It was as if he strongly believed that he had found a channel through which to present to the world the message he had been given from the spirit world.

It was clear that he was very anxious that this message was about to get lost. It is possible that this sense of anxiety had been sharpened by the announcement the previous day that the commissioners in Anambra State had all been changed. This was reinforcement, if one was needed, of the sense of



the mutability of things. And so he had rushed down to see me. That meant some postponement in my travelling because I had myself come to the decision that the Nwagu Aneke work was urgent enough for me to alter my own arrangements based on the demands of Nwagu Aneke's missionary zeal.

Nwagu Aneke himself has become recognized by the University of Nigeria and he is currently employed as a "Writer in Residence". The irony is not lost on him - and he hardly ever stops singing about he who never went to school who is now employed in the highest institution of learning.

## B. THE MAN

Who then is Nwagu Aneke? What is his background? How did he come by his script and message and how was he selected to be the bearer of the significant proposals which fill his writings?

### 1. His Birth

Nwagu Aneke comes from Umuleri in Anambra Local Government Area of Anambra State of Nigeria. He is now about 70 years of age, a gaunt, sparse, ascetic man who walks barefoot with long strides.

The circumstances of his birth, as narrated by himself, give a sense of a mystery that started long before he was born. Apparently his mother, Ekwuno, did have a son before him but he had died early and since then she had had a series of daughters. In the Igbo traditional context it is not a happy thing for a family, or even a sub-family of a woman in a polygamous household, to have only daughters. His mother was therefore unhappy about the series of daughters she was having and she was not enjoying being made the object of derision by other women because of her misfortune.

It was while his mother was nursing Nwagu's immediate senior sister that a fellow woman came to her and congratulated her on her son. Ekwuno was justifiably angry with her friend, considering that she was nursing a daughter and, in the tradition, there was a period of three years between children and there was no guarantee that, after this series of daughters, her next child was going to be a boy. The friend however insisted to Ekwuno that she had seen a son for her in a dream.

In the dream the woman was going to the Otuocho riverside market through a wilderness of forest land that lay between Umuleri town and the market. On her way to the market she saw a handsome boy, all by himself, digging a hole by the side of the road. On her way back from market later in the evening she saw that the boy was still there digging away at the hole. She was attracted to him and went over and asked him why he was there in the wilderness playing by himself till so late. The boy said that he was the son of Ekwuno from Umuleri but that his mates had obstructed him from coming into the town. Ekwuno was satisfied that her friend was not mocking her maliciously but she did not see into the future for the reality of the

story.

Some years afterwards, Aniemeke, Nwagụ's father, during a journey away from home met a relation in circumstances that were suspicious. He came home and reported the relation to the community in the legitimate hope that the culprit would be warned against disgracing the community abroad. Unfortunately the relation turned the table on him and raised a group to charge Aniemeke's wife, Ekwuno, of witchcraft. Enough conflict was generated for Aniemeke and his family to have to move out of the town. In their movement, they settled in the wilderness between Umuleri town and the river side market, Otuocha. It was here, <sup>foreman in Ekunno's name,</sup> that the next child was conceived and born - a boy that was called Nwagụ which translates literally into "Child-of-the-wilderness".

## 2. His Early Life

Nwagụ retains a very vivid memory of his mother and her contributions to his life. His father died early and he had to grow up in the wilderness, away from the generality of his people, with his mother as his main sustenance and his guide. In this role, he thinks she had special assistance from the deity of her ancestral people, Aroh of Umu-Ejiofor in Nteje. Indeed, he believes it was the habitation of this deity in his mother that led to some of her unexplained actions that made credible the charge of witchcraft which their enemies levied against her. In Nwagụ Aneke's own personal shrine Aroh of Umu-Ejiofor holds a very special place beside his own Chukwu Okike.

In spite of their secluded environment, his mother made sure that Nwagụ was not behind his age group in anything. So he was early in completing the preliminary titles taken by young people. As he matured into manhood, he became a farmer. Soon also he found out that he had medical and visionary powers and he then became a herbalist and fortune-teller, that is, a *dibịa*. His own description of this phase in an interview of 14th June 1988 shows his pride in his early career:

Alụlụ m ọlụ ji, ọlụ ugbo, lụtasịa nya mma mgbe gboo avụ. Ji, ma akpụ, ma nduko, ma ive niine. E wee mesie, m wee mezie nke dibịa.

(I cultivated yam, I worked the farm and I did it really well in those days. Yams, and cassava, and potatoes, and everything. In the end, I became a *dibịa*".)

It was after ten years of single-minded dedication to the *dibịa* role that the next call came, the call to literacy and prophecy.

In a subsequent interview of June 28, 1988, Nwagụ Aneke summarized graphically his life before the call. He described how his mother Ekwuno started him early to title taking, and how indeed having a loving and hardworking mother makes all the difference to the growing young ambitious person. He spoke of his early achievement in farming better than his mates,



taking the appropriate titles ahead of his group, and marrying early. He spoke finally of how he entered into his new assignment which deranged him and made him a person possessed by the spirits so that he was then completely dependent for his food and other requirements on whatever his mother and his wife could produce.

### 3. The Coming of the Message

Nwagu Aneke describes how he received his new assignment, in the next chapter of this book. The bare bones of the story is that the spirit beings, *ndi mmọ*, came to Nwagu in his sleep and asked him to perform a ritual of purification at the shrine of *Ajana*, the deity of Nneyi, Umuleri. When finally he had performed the ritual, they came back to tell him that the many functions with which he would now be assigned required that he be literate and so he would be literate.

There will be some discussion later in this Introduction of the questions raised by the phenomenon of stories of inspiration of scripts. Let me briefly mention here one attitude <sup>to the issue</sup> that has been adopted <sup>to the issue</sup> to it in the case of Nwagu Aneke. On one occasion when I gave a talk on the Nwagu Aneke phenomenon at the University of Nigeria campus, a member of the audience was quite enraged with the story and talked of the African tendency to wrap their inventions around with mystery, thereby denying us of the logical rational processes by which they arrived at the invention and therefore preventing the repeatability of their knowledge.

It is significant however that *ndi mmọ* did not hand Nwagu Aneke an already full-fledged script. They put him through the trouble and torture of learning to be literate. Nwagu Aneke's story is that over a period of years, he had to wander through the forests, looking for leaves on which graphic designs were visible. He could spend days in the forests, wandering long distances, collecting these leaves till he had filled his bag. The Sun was a great help to him, that is the Sun deity whom he honours. The sun would glow in waves thereby alerting him to the fact that he was near a leaf that had a meaningful symbol. When he had gathered a load of these leaves, he would then go home and copy the designs on the leaves on to whatever surface he could find. He used whatever sheets of paper he could find. But he also used stretched out empty match boxes and cigarette packets. He wandered in the forest for so long that his people thought and said that he was mad. But let Nwagu Aneke tell his own story as he did in an interview of 28th June 1988.

Ive di n'ive nwe o gbagelili anya. E kwugbue ye mma, m gwa gi ka e ji we lu o lu nwa, o chali baa. Soso Chukwu ya-akowa ya. O nwero mmadi ya-akowa ya. Maka na avunuro ya izizi bu, m mekete, m puta ututu, m ba n'ovia. M бага n'ovia, m bulu akpa, ivena - bigi bagi. M vu akwukwo osisi nwe edeli ive n'enu ye. M si

n'ónwa niri, m jeve ibe a ya-avurọ mmadi n'abọ ma ọ bụ itọ. M wee kúta ovu nwe n'ónwa, kúta ovu nwe n'ónwa, na-akụi n'aya n'akpa, na akụi n'aya n'akpa. Emekelēli ibe anyị si nọọ ala ka mụ n'ayi. A si kedi ive Nwagụ na-eme nwọọ. Kedi ive Nwagụ na-aga ọ na-aga amụ. M wee kúlīde akwụkwọ avụ delee akpa avụ eju, m bulu nava m je kọpīlīde ye n'akwụkwọ.

M kọpīlīde ye, kọpīlīde ye, ọ bulu na mụ akọpīsia ovu avụ, m sue ye oku. M sue akwụkwọ niine avụ oku. Bupu ya n'ezi je sue nye oku ma mụ kọpīlīsia ive di ya. M na-akopita ive di n'akwụkwọ osisi, m ne-etii ye na nke a. M na-akopitasị ya, m ne-etii ye n'udi a.

Nke avụ wee gaa, ee?, anyị we mụva nke isokọ okwu. Ive niine nwe anyị kọpīsili, e wee sokwuteve ye ka nnwọ na nnwọ wee dana, ka nnwọ na nnwọ wee dana. Ive n'agwa gi bụ na o nwerọ ive tali avuvu ...

## Translation

What was involved in this activity was very complex. To describe the whole nature of topic, if I should say what went into this work, it is mysterious. Only God can explain it. There is no human being that can ~~can~~ reveal its details. It is something that has not been seen before that, from time to time, I would wake up in the morning and enter the forest. When going into the forest I would carry a bag, ~~a~~ "big bag" as the English would say. I would see tree leaves on which symbols had been written. I would go from one place to another, to places where one might not see up to two or three people. I would pick one leaf from here, pick another leaf from another place, gathering them into my bag. After some time my neighbours said that it was madness that had affected me. They would ask what Nwagụ was going from place to place to learn. I would keep on gathering leaves till the bag was full, then I would carry it home and start "copying" it on to paper.

I would keep copying and copying the marks, then when I had finished copying what I had I would burn them. I would burn up all those leaves. I would carry the leaves out of the house and burn them when I had finished copying them. So I would be copying what was on the tree leaves and putting them on this [paper]. As I copied them, I would put them in this form.

That stage was over, eh?, and we started to learn to put words together. All these symbols we had "copied" we had to join them up, so that this one and that one would go together, another and another would go together. What I am telling you is that there has never been anything that was so excruciating ...

Over the years then, the spirits who put those symbols on the leaves made Nwagụ Aneke go through a tedious process of gathering these symbols in their scattered forms, then identifying syllabic sounds with the symbols, and then making single symbols or clusters of symbols to represent the names of people, objects, activities, to reproduce statements about the world. This was



the stage that Nwagu Aneke found most challenging and difficult for his inspiration and memory had to stand the test of consistency and comprehensiveness. But over the years he did develop the script. ~~8/~~ It is important at this point to recount some of the offshoots of the sufferings involved in the process of generating this script and living ~~with it~~ as a messenger of spirit beings. o

#### 4. Life as a Visionary

Nwagu continued with this learning process and naturally people around him still thought he was mad. He was not joining in any of the village events, he was not participating in any activity, he was doing nothing that the people could see as creative work. This situation continued in this way to the 1967-70 Nigerian Civil war when everybody ran from the invading Nigerian soldiers, some deeper into Biafra, others deeper into the bush. Nwagu Aneke was one of those who ran deeper into the bush.

In the bush the activities of the village continued, and some records had to be kept of these activities ~~s/~~ that whenever the war ended there would be a reporting on the events that had taken place. Those who went to school were naturally thought to be the most appropriate to keep the records but Nwagu Aneke in his own script and style kept record of who paid what taxes, who took titles, who married ~~and~~ <sup>would have</sup> who engaged in such other activities generally which the community ~~has~~ <sup>has to</sup> talk about at the end of the war. When the people of Umuleri regathered in their home ground after the war ended and people were requested to recount the activities of the period, while those who went to school read with some measure of uncertainty from their script, written in the standard Roman alphabet, Nwagu Aneke was able to recount fluently what happened, reading from his own script. It was at this period that the people of Umuleri realized that there was something genuine in him, that it was not just a madness that attacked Nwagu Aneke but that a script had been invented which could be used for communication.

But this was soon forgotten and Nwagu was again regarded with suspicion and ridicule by his people. What was this man doing who never went to school and yet from day to day he sits in his house saying that he is writing? What can he be writing? What does he know to write since he never went to school?

Life was very hard for Nwagu Aneke. It was in the same interview of June 28, 1989, that he explained how much stress he was put to sometimes, especially from the complete possession which his assignment took of him such that he was incapable of doing any other thing, and members of his family were suffering physical and psychological hardships. Especially after his mother died he struggled sometimes to go to the farm but found himself completely physically incapacitated. He believes that *ndi mmọ* made his ankles and his waist heavy and weak deliberately as a way to tie him down because, if they had been viable, after some of the insults he received, and

after some of the worst times in his family, he would either have returned to the farm or gone off to long distance trade in which his people were doing well - or even to long distance medical journeys. But at a point the only way he saw out was to go and commit suicide.

M mekete, m je kwadove oruro. Si ka m je kwua ụdọ. Kedi ive i si ka mu mezi. Puta mbosi avu - aru mgbe a ne-ekwu ive nwe, na-amutago mu nwa. O to tekwuwo. M wee ligolu... We puta mbosi avu, bia chili ụdọ, si na tani ka ive nwe je-ebe. Qo nnidi? I loteli okwu m gwali gi wee si gi na a na-achoro onwu achọ, nọ ndu ka a na-achọ achọ; na onye si ka ya nwuru n'ututu nwa, o nwuru. Wee cheketi ye, cheketi ye, si ya na o buro mu. Chili ụdọ si ka mu je roo n'enu.

Okili dọo n'enu a kpochaghali si "Nọ egwu n'atu mu? O bu egwu na-atu mu e?" M si nọ egwu na-atu mu. M si ya nọ egwu na-atu mu. O kwuve nta kwuve imo, kwuve nta kwuve imo. Kwukete, m wee na zidete. Bata n'ụmọ je die edie.

#### Translation

After some time I prepared myself to commit suicide. I decided to go and hang myself. I came out that morning - at this time I am talking about I had had children and they had grown. I began to climb ... I came out that morning, and collected the rope, and decided that that day was going to be the end of all that suffering. What was all this for? You will remember that I told you that death is not far to seek, that it is life that is hard to find; that any morning anybody decides to die he can find his death. I thought and thought about things and knew there was nothing more in life for me. So I took the rope and went to hang myself from a height.

The sunbird sitting on the tree chattering asked "Was I afraid? Was it fear that oppressed me?" I said yes I was afraid. I confessed to it that it was fear that harassed me. It started to spiel all kinds of statements at great speed. After some utterances I came down from the tree. I went back to my room and lay down on the bed.

By some fortuitous coincidence, that day after his failed bid to remove himself, his son who was working at Aba arrived and, suspecting after consultation with the family that things were in dire straits, went out and bought and brought back a whole load of food stuffs to keep the family going for some time.

Nwagu Aneke keeps a diary in which he records not only what the spirits tell him of general interest but also details of his people's lives and of his own life. From his diaries one can trace events in his life. He keeps a record of all the people who have helped him along the path of his work. He insists that two in particular be mentioned. Ignatius Igweze was the first person who saw potential in him and transcribed some of the texts initially to Nwagu Aneke's reading. The other is Ike Manafa, the man who first brought



him to me, who sometimes helped to keep him alive with food and moral support when he was in despair. There are others who took him to the newspaper or radio and television, or who gave him money, all of which he recorded carefully as they happened. Incidentally, he also records those who maltreated him, chased him from their houses, or troubled him over land and property.

What is of central concern for us however is the way <sup>Nwagu Aneke sees</sup> he saw himself and his assignment. What emerges is that he sees himself as an agent of ndi mmọ whose work of reintegration of humanity and redirection of the black races he is doing. Often, he prays that the assignment he has been given be made manifest to the public and he has been full of despair that this appeared never to be about to happen. Nwagu Aneke sees himself as carrying the burden of improving the world and suffers from the immense frustration of seeing nobody taking him seriously after several years of doing the work for which he was sent.

In spite of his frustration and poverty, however, Nwagu Aneke did not develop any loss of confidence in his stature as a prophet. Poverty led to personal and family suffering. But that the world did not listen to him was a loss to the world. He as a prophet was equipped with powers like communicating with animals and birds, and one of his stories concerns a visit to him by Lightning in the physical shape of a moving beam of light the size of a candle. And so he was most often not afraid when he was talking to the world about what was going wrong. And he believed that <sup>those</sup> anybody who insulted Nwagu Aneke would have the insult revert to themselves.

Nwagu Aneke actually wrote Chapter 25 on Thursday, the 19th of January, 1989, and expressed a final despair that his life had been a failure and his work had gone unrecognized. On the 20th of January, I received a letter from Professor Chimere Ikoku, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, which changed Nwagu Aneke's fortune for he now became a "Writer-in-Residence" at the University of Nigeria. Hopefully, with this book, his message will be heard in a wider world.

## C. THE SCRIPT

### 1. The Importance of Scripts: A World Perspective

The importance of scripts and of writing has been the subject and the inference in many writings and investigations. This idea can be reinforced randomly in different ways. <sup>for example</sup> Referring to some archaeological finds in Bulgaria <sup>which showed</sup> the rudiments of pictographs and ideograms, the author of the article on "Beginnings of Primitive Writing in Bulgaria" claimed that "the emergence of written signs and the beginnings of a script are the marks of a culture far advanced for its time and in no way inferior to the prehistoric cultures of Asia Minor, and Middle East and Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

I picked up an old issue of National Geographic Magazine by accident

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1. OBZOR: A Bulgarian Quarterly Review of Literature and Arts 77 (1986): 81

The University Library at Nkette sent me the first issue they received of a Bulgarian Journal. There was an essay "Beginnings" which



and saw an article on "EBLA: Splendor of an Unknown Empire" and its first page attracted my attention for it was a picture of a clay tablet. The caption read:

Lost pages from history's first chapters, 4,500-year-old clay tablets found in northwestern Syria reveal that Ebla rivaled Egypt and Mesopotamia as a major power of the ancient world. Written in the oldest Semitic language yet identified, documents such as this accounting of wages for palace workers have scholars rethinking civilization's formative years.<sup>2</sup>

The essay describes archaeological excavations that took place in northwestern Syria from 1960. The enthusiasm with which it reports the finding, in 1975, of 15,000 tablets as an "archaeological jackpot" shows the value attached to writing.

The contents of the tablets themselves reveal a lot of the history of the place and period. But also we find information on the status of the scribe:

On a list of professions found at Ebla, that of scribe is rated number one. Not only did a scribe's peculiar skills enable a king - himself usually illiterate - to make his will known throughout his dominions, but the stylus, flicking across wet clay, kept the commercial records that organized trade. He wrote the treaties that bound states together and described the wars that split them asunder. Not least, he recorded the liturgies and anthems to the deities who stood between mankind and impending doom.

The ancient world knew well the overwhelming power of the word. ...<sup>3</sup>

The author of the essay put the script of the Eblites in the context of the development of writing in the ancient Near East as the cradle of writing in our world.

Some general information of that type is valuable as an introduction to the Nwagu Aneke script. For the African today lives in two worlds - a modern world of dates and events but also a world that reconnects with the beginnings of human culture and civilization.

Nwagu Aneke comes at the tail end of a process that has been going on for more than 6,000 years all over the world since the earliest scripts were invented among the Sumerians of Mesopotamia. Even the Sumerian script was at the tail end of a process which human beings must have been conducting since they appeared on earth more than 250,000 years ago, that is, finding ways of keeping things in memory outside the human head, and ways of sending messages over time and space so that they are not lost through the failure of human memory.

2. National Geographic 154.6 (December 1978): 731.

3. Ibid., p.749-50. 262.2

4. Scientific America (February 1990): 87-88



Historians of writing have identified the various forms which aids to memory took from the mere semiotic mark, defined by Walter Ong as "any visible or sensible mark which an individual makes and assigns meaning to",<sup>5</sup> to full writing or script in which, as again Ong writes,

encoded visible markings engage words fully so that the exquisitely intricate structures and references evolved in sound can be visibly recorded exactly in their specific complexity and, because visibly recorded, can implement production of still more exquisite structures and references far surpassing the potentials of oral utterance".<sup>6</sup>

The history of the development of writing goes parallel with the growth of civilization.<sup>7</sup> The historians are agreed that the first writing system was the cuneiform script of Sumeria which has been dated to about 3,500 B.C. The Egyptian hieroglyphics came very closely behind that about 3,000 B.C. Other scripts originated in the Indus valley between 3,000 and 2,400 B.C. Since then there has been a proliferation of scripts.

It is generally agreed that these scripts arose as practical methods for the solution of the problems of preserving and spreading information. They were usually used for recording economic transactions between cities and states, and they also served as records of legislative decisions and as means for promulgating them. Administrative records - taxes, official matters, appointments etc. were preserved in writing. Scripts were therefore the preserves of scribes who were attached to the seats of power and held in importance because of the value of their skills for the states and their leaders - kings and priests.

Writing was therefore an elitist occupation and scripts tended not to develop towards the democratization of the skills of writing and reading. Attempts of a diffusionist kind have been made to establish that all writing

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<sup>5</sup>. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 84

<sup>6</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 84-5

<sup>7</sup>. Details of the study of the history of writing are to be found in books ranging from the premier studies by Dirringer (1953) and Gelb (1963) to more modern explorations and surveys like Hans Jensen's *Sign, Symbol and Script: An Account of Man's Effort to Write* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 3rd edition 1970); Eric A. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976); Albertine Gaur, *A History of Writing* (London: The British Library, 1984); George Sampson, *Writing Systems: A Linguistic Introduction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1985); and several other publications that take this history into account in their studies of the phenomenon and history of literacy.

followed from that started in Mesopotamia, but this has become a losing stand to adopt in the face of evidence from China and American Indian traditions and time of writing.<sup>8</sup>

This review of history not only establishes the length of time over which scripts have existed, it also shows that various scripts have operated from different perspectives in the solution of the problem of graphic representation. This variety has led to classifications which reflect on whether the graphicization derives from an attempt to draw a picture of the object or idea that is being symbolized (semasiographic writing), or whether it is an attempt to reproduce the sounds of the language (phonographic or glottographic<sup>9</sup>).

The studies also establish a progression which appears to have become accepted that writing developed from the earliest pictorial representations or first order symbols "standing in direct representative relation to objects (sheep, goats, grain, etc.) through second order symbols, like "numerical concepts ..[which are].. more than the representation of mere sensory perceptions, they include a mental processing that transcends the morphology of real entities, the form (or "gestalt") of things which can be perceived and reproduced in symbolic form", to writing as a "language sign".<sup>10</sup>

At the level of writing as a glottographic system, there are then the stages of representation of the units - whether they are scripts derived from the lexical or the morphemic level (pleremic script) or whether the script is derived from the syllabic or the phonemic level (cenemic script). In spite of the overlapping which William Haas establishes as taking place in most

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<sup>8</sup>. Geoffrey Sampson says quite firmly "I am sceptical about the monogenetic hypothesis. Gelb seems to me to exaggerate the similarities between different early scripts, and he is too ready to dismiss systems which do not fit his case as not being fully-fledged glottographic writing. For instance, although the inscriptions of the Maya of Central America are not yet deciphered, I believe it is far from clear that Gelb is justified in denying that they constitute writing in the full sense." *Writing Systems*, p. 46-7. The Maya hieroglyphics are becoming the basis of serious historical studies as in Joyce Marcus's *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1976). See also Hanns J. Prem and Berthold Riese, "Authochthonous American writing systems: The Aztec and Maya examples", in *Writing in Focus*, pp. 167-186.

<sup>9</sup>. I.G. Gelb as amended by E. Pulgram. This is quoted by William Haas in "Determining the level of a script", *Writing in Focus*, p. 16 fn 1.

<sup>10</sup>. Summarised from Konrad Ehlich, "Development of Writing as social problem solving", in *Writing in Focus*, pp. 99-129.



orthographies,<sup>1</sup> it is still possible to insist that one script is more related to one tradition than to another.

Even at the cenemic level, there is still a further differentiation which has been the basis of much debate in the assessment of scripts and their development. That is the distinction between the syllabic and the phonemic/alphabetic.<sup>2</sup> The development of alphabetic script has been attributed to the Greeks. The Semites had borrowed Egyptian hieroglyphics, at least they had borrowed the acrophonic principle of many of the hieroglyphic graphs. They ~~Semites~~ had then developed Arabic and Hebrew, both of which are consonantal scripts, so designated because they had symbols for consonants but not for vowels. The Phoenician brand of this Semitic alphabet was adopted by the Greeks. As Tobin Nellhaus summarizes the story from a variety of sources, "The Greek alphabet introduced vowel signs, largely because its words often began with vowels or contained combinations of sounds that the Phoenician script could not represent".<sup>3</sup> Great advantages arose from this invention for the Greeks and for world civilization.

Two themes emerging from this story are pertinent to our subject. One is that confronted with the need for a writing system, the Greeks who had reverted to illiteracy after the failure of the Akkadian cuneiform script tradition, adopted and adapted an existing script. Much methodological scholarship in connection with the development of writing for languages which have no scripts has been based on this principle.<sup>4</sup>

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1. "Determining the level of a script", *Writing in Focus*, pp.15-29

2. Geoffrey Sampson goes further to sub-divide the cenemic or phonographic into syllabic, segmental, and featural, but I believe the two-pronged division is adequate.

3. "Literacy, Tyranny, and the Invention of Greek Tragedy", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* III.2 (Spring, 1989): 58. In this summary he was following Eric A. Havelock's *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

4. See, for example, Werner Winter's "Tradition and innovation in alphabet making" which starts with "It can probably be said without exaggeration that the days when writing systems could be developed as it were *in vacuo* are gone forever. With writing practiced all over the world and within relatively easy reach of every person who might feel the need to convert a hitherto unwritten language into written form, a fully spontaneous solution of the task at hand can hardly be imagined." (*Writing in Focus*, p.227). See also *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1977), in which current attempts in connection with various languages are discussed.

The other issue is that scholarship has tended to establish immense advantages that accrued to Civilization because of the development of the alphabetic script. Alphabetic script is <sup>the most</sup> explicit, exact and unambiguous; it is most flexible, easier <sup>to use for</sup> to represent words in other languages accurately; <sup>it is</sup> relatively simple because there is a one-to-one relationship of inscription and phoneme. Therefore, the alphabetic script is supposed to be more easy to learn than any previous form of writing. Therefore, there was a break with the tradition of Egypt and Persia where syllabaries and pictograms were complex and numerous and were the exclusive preserves of bureaucracies, to the development of democratization of writing, and the consequent growth of tragedy, philosophy, and democratic politics. Though there is now some debate as to whether these claims have not been exaggerated, the mentality created by the theory holds sway and declares alphabetic writing the most advanced and beneficial system of writing.

## 2. Scripts in Africa.

Since man has been at least as old in Africa as anywhere else, it is to be expected that he has also been attempting solutions to ways of keeping records, to the problem of communicating over time and distance.

Various systems have been identified. There were the pre-writing forms like rock paintings examples of which have been found in the rock shelters of Tasilli in the Sahara desert. These were magical communications connected with hunting activities. Pictographic realizations and emblematic carvings, like those representing the mythical chain and the beaded crown, <sup>the</sup> ~~are~~ in a Yoruba statue of Oduduwa, constitute another form of pre-writing communication. Other methods of communication include the talking drums, the aroko, and similar symbolic media.<sup>15</sup> There were additional semiotic symbolizations like notches on bows to indicate how many game one had killed, certain plants and fruits had meanings attached to them in the communication strategies of the people, and, even beyond these, there were the recognized and identifiable meanings of body paintings and wall decorations. The study by Kathleen Hau of the graphic designs on door panels and elephant tusks of the Benin kingdom suggests that some of these designs could have been early forms of writing.<sup>16</sup>

But Africa also did invent scripts. We have already mentioned Egypt because of its importance in the development of scripts in the world. Egyptian hieroglyphics represent Africa's first contribution to the development of world writing skills. Directly following from and derived from Egypt came

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<sup>15</sup> See Omotoso Eluyemi, "African Systems of Contact and Communication", *Nigeria Magazine* 55.2 (1987): 36-49.

<sup>16</sup> "The ancient writing of Southern Nigeria", *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N* t.XXIX, ser. B, No. 1-2 (1967): 150-190.



the Meroitic script which, unfortunately, has not been fully deciphered. But there have been more <sup>distinctly</sup> clearly African scripts invented in West Africa since the 19th century. Since the Vai script which was first noticed by European scholars in the early 19th century,<sup>17</sup> there has been a proliferation of script inventions in West Africa, with recognizable clusters in the Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea area, and the Cameroons, Eastern Nigeria area.

The most prominent of these scripts have been the Vai itself<sup>18</sup>, the Mende<sup>19</sup>, Loma<sup>20</sup>, Toma<sup>21</sup>, Bete<sup>22</sup>, Manding, Wolof, Kpelle or Gerze of Senegal, and

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17. Some of the most significant early notices and studies were F.E. Forbes and E. Norris, "Despatch communicating the discovery of a native written character on the Western coast of Africa near Liberia, accomp. by a Vocabulary of the Vahie or Vei language and alphabet", London, 1849, published in *Journ. Roy. Geogr. Soc.* XX (1851): 89-101; E. Norris, "Notes on the Vei Language and Alphabet", *Journ. Roy. Geogr. Soc.* XX (1851): 101-113; S.W. Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Vy Country of West Africa, and the Discovery of a System of Syllabic Writing Recently Invented by the Natives of the Vy Tribe*, (London: Seeleys, 1849); and S.W. Koelle, *Outlines of a Grammar of the Vei Language Together with a Vei-English Vocabulary* (London: Church Missionary House, 1854).

18. Extensive studies have been done of the Vai Script, and continue to be done as we shall see in other footnotes. These ~~continued~~ <sup>progressed</sup> from the early studies of M. Delafosse, "Les Vai, leur langue et leur système d'écriture", *L'Anthropologie* X (1899): 129-151, 254-266; F.W. Migeod, "The Syllabic Writing of the Fai People", *J. of Afr. Soc.* IX (1909-10): 46-58; M.M. Massaquoi, "The Vai people and their syllabic writing", *J. of Afr. Soc.* X (1911): 459-466; and A. Klingenhoben, "The Vai-Script", *Africa* VI (1933): 158-171; to the later more over-view studies P.E.H. Hair, "Notes on the discovery of the Vai Script, with Bibliography", *Sierra Leone Language Review* 2 (1963): 36-49; Svend E. Holsoe, "An Early Vai Manuscript from Liberia", *African Languages/Langues Africains* 2 (1976): 33-59; and others to be later mentioned.

19. See A.T. Sumner, "Mendi Writing", *Sierra Leone Studies* O.S. XVII (1932): 29-33; S. Milburn, "Kisimi Kamara and the Mende Script", *Sierra Leone Language Review* 3 (1964): 20-23; and David Dalby, "An Investigation into the Mended Syllabary of Kisimi Kamara", *Sierra Leone Studies* N.S. 19 (1966): 119-123.

20. See Theodore Monod, who reports on the discovery and gives a description and illustration of this syllabic script in "A new West African alphabet used by the Toma, French Guinea and Liberia", *Man* XLIII (1943): No. 85, pp. 108-112; and also Joseph Joffre, "Sur un nouvel alphabet ouest-africain: le Toma", *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N* 7.1-4 (1945): 160-173.

21. See Theodore Monod, "Un nouvel alphabet ouest-africain: le bété (Côte d'Ivoire)", *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N* XX.1-2 (1958): 432-553.

Fula in the Western Sudan; and the Bamum<sup>22</sup> and Bagam or Eghap<sup>23</sup> of Cameroons. In Southern Nigeria from where Nwagu Aneke comes, except for the esoteric religious inspiration scripts like the Obare Okaime<sup>24</sup> among the Ibibio and Efik of Eastern Nigeria, and the Holy Writing of the Yoruba religious leader of the Aladura movement, Rev. Josiah Oshitelu<sup>25</sup>, there has been the Nsibidi used among the Efik and Ibibio, the Ekoi, and the Cross-River Igbo of Eastern Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> Some scripts are still being discovered. This book shows that some more are still being invented.

These communication systems range from inspired writing of inspired languages, sometimes indecipherable by normal persons, to pictographic and ideogram<sup>27</sup> systems of communication<sup>28</sup>, to syllabic scripts, some written from left to right and others written from right to left. Several scholars have<sup>29</sup> and speculated on these scripts, the essays ranging from brief notices of the systems, to histories of the discovery and use of the scripts, to full-scale

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<sup>22</sup>. There have been several studies of the Bamum script invented by the brilliant administrator and anti-colonial King Njoya of the Cameroons, but the standard work is the 3 volume *Die Bamumschrift* by A. Schmitt, Wiesbaden, 1963. Note also I. Dugast and M.D.W. Jeffreys, *L'Ecriture des Bamum*, I.F.A.N. (Cameroons), 1950, and Claude E. Wetch, Jr., "Njoya and the Bamoun Script", *West Africa*, June 6, 1964, p.621.

<sup>23</sup> See L.W.G. Malcolm, "Short notes on the syllabic writing of the Eghap - Central Cameroons", *J. Afr. Soc.* XX (1920-21): 127-129.

<sup>24</sup>. See R.F.G. Adam, "Oberi Okaime: a new African language and script", *Africa* XVII (1947): 23-34; and K. Hau, "Oberi Okaime script, texts and counting system", *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N* XXIII. 1.2 (1961): 291-308.

<sup>25</sup>. See H.W. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church 1: the Church of the Holy Lord (Aladura)* (Oxford, 1967), esp. pp. 35 ff.

<sup>26</sup>. See later notes.

<sup>27</sup>. One may note here the pictograms and ideograms used by the Bambara and Bozo, and by the Dogon as described in M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, *Signes graphiques soudanais* (Paris, 1951) and D. Zahan, "Pictographic writing in the Western Sudan", *Man*, L/219, 1950.



analysis and comparison of the writing systems. <sup>29. ##</sup> But let me move to a summary of relevant issues.

Albertine Gaur, in her *A History of Writing*, gives a brief summary of the history of African scripts and puts a rather bleak prognostication on their chances of survival and usefulness. After presenting the characteristics, history and development of the main groups of the scripts of the world in several chapters, she has a small chapter on "New Scripts" in which she has only the following to say about African scripts:

A fascinating chapter in the history of writing tells of the way in which a number of phonetic scripts evolved during the 19th century, quite suddenly, among primitive societies in Africa, America and certain parts of Asia - sometimes under the influence of western missionaries, sometimes as a result of contact with, at least a knowledge (often quite rudimentary) of, the Roman alphabet, or more rarely, the Arabic consonant script.

The majority of these scripts show considerable similarity in their development. In nearly every case the inventor is known by name, and date of the invention is recorded. Most of these scripts began with pictographic signs for objects, ideas and actions. These early pictures were often not very different from those habitually used by tribal communities for communication and information storage. .. In almost every instance the direction of development followed similar lines: an idea script moved towards a word (picture) script and on to the introduction of phonetic elements, mostly on the basis of the rebus principle, to culminate finally in a syllabic script. The only script that was from the beginning alphabetic, with twenty-two consonants and five vowels signs, was invented by the son of the Somali Sultan, Yusuf Ali, who knew Arabic as well as Italian. The progress towards a syllabic structure was usually accompanied by a reduction in the number of signs and a simplification of their shape. The process of evolution was in most cases complete within two generations, and in spite of (at times considerable) local success, all scripts were soon replaced by the Roman alphabet.<sup>29</sup>

What Albertine Gaur has done here is to summarize a growing body of scholarship which has explored the scripts that have been developed in West Africa since the Vai script was discovered by the Europeans in 1847. One need not react at this point to the condescension in this statement and <sup>the</sup> description

<sup>29.</sup> In addition to the Dalby essays which I will discuss later, there have been, for example, the following valuable general studies of the various scripts: J. Friedrich, "Zu einigen Schrifteefindungen der neuesten Zeit", *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 92 (NF) (1938): 189-208; Hans Jensen, Chapter VIII: "African Scripts" in his *Sign, Symbol and Script: An Account of Man's Efforts to Write*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 3rd edition 1970) pp. 217-227; "African Writing Systems", Chapter XVI in *Language in Africa: An Introductory Survey* pp. 174-197.

<sup>29</sup> (London: The British Library, 1984), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> A History of writing

By the end of this section, most of these issues will be seen to be capable of other interpretations

of African societies as "primitive". The relevant issues raised concern influence on the origin of the scripts, the progression from pictographic traditional graphic symbols to word script to the syllabic, achieved through reduction of number and simplification of design, and the ultimate and apparently inevitable replacement of the scripts by the Roman alphabet. ←

The review essays by David Dalby from 1967-1969 still stand out as the most comprehensive explorations of the several scripts that developed in West Africa from the early 19th century.<sup>30</sup> Of the many issues raised, I believe two concern us most urgently here and call for serious comment. One is the question of the usefulness of the syllabic script for African languages. Dalby notes the pedagogic and linguistic implications of the question which he poses in the following terms:

Does the development of syllabic forms of writing among no less than seven West African tribes reflect the fact that an alphabet - despite its economy of form - is perhaps less suitable than a syllabary for the transcription and analysis of African languages?<sup>31</sup>

and he surveys some of the answers<sup>3</sup> given in the past hundred years of the discussion from the British linguist E. Norris in 1849/50 to F.W.H. Migeod in 1913. I will take up this question in my discussion of the potential uses of the Nwagụ Aneke script.

The second question has to do with the issue of the inspiration of those scripts. After a summary of the stories of inspiration and revelation, Dalby states: "It is, of course, impossible to determine whether or not these accounts of dreams are 'true', but the important fact about them is that the claim to supernatural inspiration has been such a regular feature".<sup>32</sup>

The doubts implied in this quotation can be rephrased into questions as to whether, in these reports of dream origins, we are dealing with

- a) the "primitive" mind attributing invention to spiritual agency in order to give it greater potency and valence in the community of his superstitious peers, or
- b) with a hyper-imaginative mind that has deluded itself into believing its own fantasy about dreams generated by psychological pressures, or

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<sup>30</sup>. "A Survey of the indigenous scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa", *African Language Studies* VIII (1967): 1-15; "The indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam: their inspiration and design", *African Language Studies* IX (1968): 156-197; "Further indigenous scripts of west Africa: Manding, Wolof and Fula Alphabets and Yoruba 'Holy' writing", *African Language Studies* X (1969): 162-181.

<sup>31</sup>2. "A Survey of the Indigenous Scripts ..." p. 1-2.

<sup>32</sup>. ALS, IX, p.159



c) with reality, meaning that there were real dreams, that there are spirit beings, ancestral and non-ancestral, that they have messages to give to human beings, that they select their medium, that they can guide him to discover a new script and that he then writes in this script.

It is clear that one's answer to these questions will depend on one's world view. Since these script inventors have operated within the African environment, they have not proposed anything that is outside the framework of their world view. The structure of their religions, as the structure of most religions that believe in inspiration, makes it possible that they are telling the truth. Nwagu Aneke is another case of an inventor of a script who has, as we shall see, claimed dream origins for his script.

Finally, for this section, let me advert to the graphic systems in the environment from which Nwagu Aneke emerged. Among the scripts described in the essays of Dalby and other historians <sup>33</sup> is the Nsibidi. This script was however the property of secret societies in the Cross River area of Eastern Igboland. Nsibidi was an ideographic script <sup>which</sup> attempted to communicate by representing human beings and human activities in diagrams which tried to picture the nature of the activity being described. It could not tell a complete, fluent story. It was invented by the Ekoi people of Cross River State and came to Igbo land through the Igbo who were closest to the Cross River. Nwagu Aneke therefore enters the arena of script invention as the first known inventor of an indigenous script for the Igbo language.

### 3. The Source of the Nwagu Aneke Script

From Nwagu Aneke's story of the coming of his script, two reasons are articulated for which it was found necessary by *ndi mmọ* that Nwagu Aneke should be literate. One is the evanescence of memory, the other is the prestige of literacy. These do accord in the main with the universally attributed reasons for the origin of scripts.

The first thing that strikes the observer though is that the script used

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<sup>33</sup>. See J.K. Macgregor, "Some Notes on Nsibidi" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 39 (1909: 209-219; Elphinstone Daryell, "Some 'Nsibidi' Signs", *Man* X.8 (1910): item 67, pp. 113-4 and "Further Notes on 'Nsibidi': Signs with their meanings from the Ikom District, Southern Nigeria", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 41 (1911): 521-540 + 3 plates; M.D.W. Jeffreys, "Corrections on *Man* 1910, item 67: Nsibidi Writing", *Man* (1964), item 192, p. 155; Donatus I. Nwoga, "African Literature: Written and Oral" and Ogbu U. Kalu, "Writing in Pre-colonial Nigeria", in *Readings in African Humanities: African Cultural Development* ed. Ogbu U. Kalu, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1978).



by Nwagu Aneke is not the alphabetic Roman script used by those who went to school nor is it a form of adaptation from that base. Indeed, the Igbo language was not in search of a script when Nwagu Aneke came on the scene. Since the middle of the 19th century when the missionaries started active work in the main centres of Igboland, Igbo has been written in the Roman alphabet. Admittedly there are still discussions and quarrels about orthography, but Nwagu Aneke has not come with his script as a conscious effort in the direction of alphabetic or orthographic revision. He is outside the scope of the scholarship and his emergence raises other questions.

A first question derived from the scholarship reviewed above immediately arises. Why did the existence of a writing system which represents sounds not lead to Nwagu just taking and modifying instead of inventing a complete new one?<sup>234</sup> Obviously he has not gone back to solve already solved problems of graphicization of language<sup>235</sup> in that his script is not logographic, nor pictographic, but operates at the developed level of

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<sup>234</sup>. In writing about the borrowing of phonographic writing from the Egyptians by the Semites, Geoffrey Sampson raises the question why "a community acquainted with an established form of phonographic writing should have created a wholly new set of graph/sound correspondences in this would - would it not have been simpler just to take those Hieroglyphic graphs which could be used to write Semitic speech and use them with their values unchanged? ... When the Greeks borrowed writing from the Semites that is just what happened." He suggests, in a rather supercilious manner speaking of "our own sophisticated ideas," that, different from the expectations today, "when the Semites first encountered writing they saw the acrophonic principle as part of its essence: writing might at first have meant drawing things to symbolize their initial sounds, so that a picture of water could represent no sound other than /m/ for people who called water /majim/. (*Writing Systems*, p.78-78). Werner Winter, writing about the problem of developing a system of writing for languages that yet have none, in connection with an experiment with Walapai, a Yuman language of Arizona in the United States of America, starts with the presumption that "Any graphic system now developed will thus be radically different from the earliest systems invented by mankind; there will always be not only a relationship between a new writing system and a language, but also one between this system and other writing systems (or at least one other writing system) already in existence. Expressed in terms of units that will serve as the basis of systems, one can say that graphic entities do not only enter a relationship with phonic units, but also one with graphic units (or combinations of units) that belong to other graphic systems." ("Tradition and innovation in alphabet making", in *Writing in Focus*, eds Florian Coulmas and Konrad Ehlich, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1983, p. 228. Semites

<sup>235</sup>. See Konrad Ehlich, "Development of writing as social problem solving", in *Writing in Focus*, pp. 99-129.



representing units of the sounds of the language. But he has not gone the whole way and adopted an alphabetic script.

Another question is, what is the derivation of the script in terms of models from earlier scripts? To what extent does he conform to the tradition established by scholarship of movement from the pictographic and ideographic to the phonographic? The first report on Nwagu Aneke appeared in the *Weekly Star* of 9th November, 1976 and carried a passage of the Nwagu Aneke script with its transcription. C. Xrydz-Eyutchae, the author of the article, speculated that Nwagu Aneke had revived an ancient Igbo script invented between 3,000 and 1,000 B.C. But he did not suggest how Nwagu Aneke could have had access to the script after so many millennia of its disappearance. The 1987 reports by the *Guardian* newspaper<sup>36</sup> and the *African Guardian*<sup>37</sup> after Nwagu Aneke had thrilled the audience at the Igbo Iri-ji festival at Enugu Stadium, again described him as reviving an ancient Igbo script called Nsibidi. This claim cannot be sustained since we have seen that Nsibidi is a pictographic/ideographic script, which is what Nwagu Aneke's script is not.

It might be possible then to say that the Igbo had their traditional graphic symbols. They were designs that were painted on bodies and walls with the uli fruit dye. These were very refined and each design had a name derived from the object or concept that had been represented in a stylized form. Studies of these symbols show their great numbers, one such scholarly synthesis reproducing 440 graphic designs with names.<sup>38</sup> Then the Igbo had the nsibidi secret society graphic message symbols. And now there is Nwagu Aneke.

If the scenario drawn by scholarship has mainly a time sequence progression, then there is support here for it. But if it went beyond that to talk of influences and borrowings, then I am afraid that the Nwagu Aneke phenomenon calls for a revision of the theory. For the origin of the Nwagu Aneke script has involved no influence or borrowing from the uli designs nor has it developed from the nsibidi. The Nwagu Aneke script provides a whole new body of graphic symbols for the writing of the Igbo language.

#### 4. The Nature of the Nwagu Aneke Script.

At this point, let me briefly describe the Nwagu Aneke script. It is glottographic and operates at the level of syllables, though, with the existence in Igbo of monosyllabic nouns, some of the script graphs would appear to be

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<sup>36</sup>. Sunday, November 1, 1987, p. B2.

<sup>37</sup>. November 26, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth A. Willis, "A Lexicon of Igbo Uli Motifs", *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities* 1 (1987): 91-121.

*the consonant is  
her*

*na file*  
logographic. The only vowel for which it has a graph is "e" as in <sup>a</sup>eighty so the rest of the graphs represent consonants. But the graphs for <sup>h</sup>consonants vary according to the vowel that concludes the syllable. Hence, for example, in consonance with the Igbo phonetic principle of regressive assimilation the word "na" has six different graphs. <sup>graph is</sup>Each one dependent for its syllabic value on <sup>the accompanying vowel, derived from reaction</sup>reaction to the first vowel of the next word. Thus, the syllable "na" turns to

= na, as in na-abia

= ne, which is what na becomes in na-ekwu (ne-ekwu)

= ni, which is what na becomes in na ime (n'ime)

= nū, as in na ūwa (n'ūwa)

= nọ, as in na ọ bu

= nu, as in na ulukpu (n'ulukpu)

*in Nwagu Aneke's script (fish)*

One may be tempted to see some logograms <sup>h</sup>as in \_\_\_\_\_ for azu<sup>h</sup> and to relate this with the long discussion in scholarship about borrowings. This temptation is strong because the same symbol used by Nwagu Aneke for fish, that is the rippled parallel graph, stands for water in both the Egyptian hieroglyphic pictograph and in the Hebrew consonantal <sup>39</sup>and water is certainly the life environment for fish. Incidentally, the same design, though only a single ripple in this case, stands for ji, "water" among the Vai <sup>40</sup>. But then one is held back from that kind of speculation about borrowing, if for nothing else, because the syllabic sound principle of Nwagu Aneke's writing yields a two graph representation \_\_\_\_\_ for mmili, which is Nwagu Aneke's Igbo dialect equivalent of "water".

*diff file*  
Nwagu Aneke writes from left to right, and this is in consonance with the fact that he grew up in an environment of the Roman alphabet that is written from left to right, and not in an Arabic language environment. One problem that arises sometimes in going through his exercise books is that sometimes <sup>in the manner of Arabic texts, backwards</sup>he wrote from the end rather than the beginning of the exercise book. Sometimes <sup>also</sup>he completed one page before he went on to the other and sometimes he wrote across the two pages. But I believe he tried to reproduce the pattern of books that he saw being read in his environment.

Some of the problems one encounters with regard to the reading of the Nwagu Aneke script I will mention briefly here. Further study will show

39. See Geoffrey Sampson, *Writing Systems*, p.78.

40. Dalby, "Indigenous Scripts ...", p. 17.



how the decipherment processes here might help future scholarship on scripts that are still not deciphered. We were lucky that we met and started work with Nwagu Aneke while it was still possible for him to read enough of his texts to save future generations from the major problems being encountered by those trying to decipher scripts from dead languages.

These problems include the following:

a) The nature of the syllabic script <sup>which represents only the</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>consonant</sup> ~~modified~~ <sup>less</sup> by its ~~concluding~~ <sup>accompanying</sup> vowel. The initial vowel has no effect on the script graph. This means that various words ~~that are made up of~~ <sup>which stand with different</sup> syllables ~~that end with the same vowel sound, get represented by the same graph~~ <sup>but</sup> and it requires the context then to identify which is being used. Before the greater specification of the graphs this was worse, but things are clearer since a few more graphs were created. For example

\_\_\_ stands for "na", and "nna", and "ana". It also used to stand for "ne" and "nne" up to about 1983 when \_\_\_ took over the representation of "ne";

\_\_\_ stands for "nya", "onye", and "anya";

\_\_\_ stands for "bu", "mbu" and for "obo" in the two-syllable word "obodo", \_\_\_\_ .

b) Occasionally a word or expression in the English language comes into the passage and if one is not aware of this one is thrown off track since the sequence of graphs means nothing in the expected Igbo in which the script is designed. Moreover, the English uses a good number of initial vowels and this is uncomfortable for a script that does not take initial vowels into account. I think that it was perhaps in order to be able to write dates like 1980, that the vowel graph for -e- in eighty was evolved. ~~This is, for example, the situation in~~ <sup>One is thrown</sup> ~~off the track till one realizes the introduction of English in the following~~ <sup>sequence of graphs</sup>

dị na Anambala Lokal Gomenti

c) Nwagu Aneke writes in the deep dialect of Anambra Local Government area and this poses problems of vocabulary and syntax. But this is perhaps the easiest problem of all since one should be ready to familiarize oneself with that dialect.

In spite of these problems, the Nwagu Aneke script shows great flexibility and comprehensiveness for the writing of Igbo. Most scripts, even English, require that one is aware of the principles that go into the process of coding sounds into graphs and decoding those graphs into the sounds of

the language. There is no script that reflects a perfect match between the graphs and the sounds. What the Nwagu Aneke script requires is time and study for the principles to be fully established and promulgated and the script will become available for many uses in Igboland and the rest of Africa.

## 5. The Value of the Nwagu Aneke Script.

This question arises in the face of the fact that an orthography based on the Roman alphabetic script has already been developed for the writing of Igbo and other African languages and syllabic scripts are theoretically a step behind the alphabetic script in accuracy and exactness and comprehensiveness in the representation of the sounds of a language. *space* ~~Consider~~ the following:

*But we would like to reflect on the following*  
a) Whatever else may be said about the value of the script, the first important contribution it has made is that it has served as a vehicle for preserving what inspired messages Nwagu Aneke has received for the black peoples and the rest of the world. This was the reason the spirit beings gave for equipping him with literacy - that his three-fold assignment could not have been fulfilled by an illiterate.

Nwagu himself has acknowledged the superiority of literacy to the powers he had earlier been given by *ndi mmọ*. One was the power of *ihwụ ohwụ*, that is, being able to sense the fates and fortunes of people by psychic communion with them; the other was the power of the *dibija* which had made it possible for him to tell people's fortune by using divination implements, to relate people's problems to the causes - psychic, spiritual, or physical, and to find and provide solutions to them. He considered these powers as less effectual because of the evanescence of the information in memory. According to Nwagu Aneke himself, when he had only those powers he could tell his clients what he saw in them and for them, but if they went out and for any reason came back for a repeat of what he had said to them he would have forgotten what he had seen. But now, he boasts, what the book says today is what it will say tomorrow, next month, next year and for ever. Nwagu Aneke is conscious of the script therefore basically as a vehicle, a medium for the message, and he so declared when I asked him on the 18th of June 1988 what he thought should be the direction and function of our renewed interaction:

Ive m chee e nweli ike ime bu na ive uwa na-eche bu ije kuzi akwukwo. Ma munwa na-eche izi ve ozi mmọ zili je-enyeli ve aka, va ya eji we na-achikwatakwu onwe ve na ndu va, ezi ve, na unọ va.

### Translation.

What I think we should do is this. What people expect is the teaching of the script. But what I want is to deliver the message from the spirit beings which will help *them* messages



that they can use to better regulate themselves in their lives, in ~~their compounds~~ <sup>public</sup> and in ~~their homes~~ <sup>private</sup> <sup>value and</sup>

The first validity for the Nwagu Aneke Script then, is that it is the vehicle for the Nwagu Aneke message.

b) Shorthand scripts have been invented and none have been found suitable for African languages because of their crucial sound differences. It is interesting that the very first newspaper article that was written about Nwagu Aneke was captioned "The Igbos had Shorthand all their own"<sup>41</sup> In 1986, when interest was revived in Nwagu Aneke, again the newspapers talked of "Igbo Nwereriji Edemede aka nkenke"<sup>42</sup>, "Teacher Appeals for Recognition of his Igbo Short-hand"<sup>43</sup> and "A New Igbo Shorthand Invented"<sup>44</sup>

Nwagu Aneke's script can certainly serve as a very effective shorthand for writing Igbo. By the same token, if properly developed, it can serve as shorthand for most African languages better than any system adopted from language bases that are far different phonetically from African languages.

c) It needs to be argued that the fact that alphabetic script is more exact and flexible for the literate people who are engaged in inter-language studies, and in reproducing exact sounds, does not also mean that it is the easiest way to learn a language for those who are illiterate, especially if they are already adult. The issues raised by David Dalby in this regard become pertinent here and the answers he summarised assume new perspectives.

Experiments that have been conducted into the teaching of reading have shown that, as summarized by Danny D. Steinberg and Helen Harper,

Although a word is longer and more complex than any one of its individual component parts, research evidence on the learning of reading indicates that the learning of whole words is easier than that of letters.<sup>45</sup>

This knowledge has been used in the improvement of the teaching of written

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<sup>41</sup>. by C. Xrydz-Eyutcha, *Weekly Star*, November 7, 1976, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup>. *Ogene*, 2.67, June 4-14, 1986, back page headline.

<sup>43</sup>. *Daily Star*, June 10, 1986, p.9.

<sup>44</sup>. *Daily Star*, November 14, 1987, p. 2

<sup>45</sup>. <sup>Quoted from her</sup> "Teaching written language as a first language to a deaf boy", *Writing in Focus*, eds. Florian Coulmas and Konrad Ehlich (Berlin; New York; Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1983), pp. 327-354.

language to the deaf.

This means that it should be considered whether a script like Nwagu Aneke's which reproduces chunks of sounds meaningful to the speaker of the language, and which thereby comes much closer to whole words than the Roman alphabet, would not be a better method for the teaching of adult literacy than the current method of spelling eh-bee-eh and asking somebody in the village to pronounce Aba. Indeed, a minor experiment I conducted myself showed that within five minutes of reading Nwagu Aneke's script with an adult he was able to identify and remember the symbols or collocation of symbols for

ubo-si \_\_\_\_\_, mmo \_\_\_\_\_, mma-di \_\_\_\_\_, chi \_\_\_\_\_, ama-mi-ve \_\_\_\_\_.  
(day) (spirit being) (human being) (God) (wisdom)

One may speculate here, even more aggressively, whether there is not an a priori case that can be made on the issue of the graphic versus the orthographic tendency of the black imagination and therefore the natural preference for such a Script as Nwagu Aneke's for literacy generally.

d) At the peak of my chauvinistic argument, let me immediately propose a value and validity for the Nwagu Aneke Script on the basis that THIS IS OUR OWN WRITING. There are Roman, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Hindu, etc. scripts. The existence of those scripts has not prevented their owners from gaining access to the best that the world has produced but it has helped them to retain an identity and keep for themselves anything that they have which they hold secret and sacred to make them what they are.

At the end of his presentation of "The West African Autochthonous Alphabets" S.I.A. Kotei discussed the colonial factor which contributed to the neglect of African scripts, even suggesting that some Colonial officers positively prohibited the spread and use of some of these scripts. <sup>46</sup> Missionaries and anthropologists and linguists are interested in the scripts for what use they can make of them, but ultimately these scripts are curiosities to them and they are ready to have them replaced with the standard Roman alphabets with which they do their own writing. Obviously, therefore, if the script is to go beyond the level of Nwagu Aneke and become a generally accepted script for the writing of Igbo and other African languages, and it has the potential for this because of the refinement of its graphics and the comprehensiveness of its representation of the sounds of Igbo and African languages, it will need the determined action of scholars and politicians with the right orientation to cultural self-hood.

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<sup>46</sup> 1. In *Advances in the Creation and Revision of Writing Systems*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1977), pp.54-73



## 6. The Future of the Nwagu Aneke Script.

What ~~we~~<sup>he</sup> have written so far about the Nwagu Aneke script would appear to have contradicted everything that Albertine Gaur has said in her description of African scripts. It has not arisen among a "primitive" people, at least in the sense that it is not a primary attempt to find an orthography for a language that was not ever written before Nwagu Aneke came on the scene. Indeed, it is a script that has arisen at a syllabic level AFTER there was an alphabetic script adopted for the language. It has not travelled the road from the "pictographic signs for objects, ideas and actions". In a way, Nsibidi had served that role for the Igbo language but Nsibidi was unknown in most of Igboland and unknown to Nwagu Aneke. The progression towards the syllabic structure by reduction in the number of symbols and simplification of their shape would appear also to be contradicted by the Nwagu Aneke script which has added ~~several more~~<sup>a few more</sup> symbols for clarification of oft used but varied valence sounds in Igbo and has shown remarkable stability and simplicity in its original signs. And its symbols have no relationships with the traditional symbols that have been established in connection with graphics, like the symbols used for the uli body and wall designs referred to above.

What appears the more threatening part of Albertine Gaur's summary is what she has written in relation to the remarkably short life of the African scripts in the face of the pressures from the international Roman script. I make a brief comment about this in the "Conclusion" to this "Introduction", but let me add here that this need not be so.

The Vai script has proved remarkably resilient in Liberia and the reasons for this are instructive. As Gail Stewart points out in a 1967 study, the predictions of earlier scholars about the imminent demise of the Vai syllabic script had been proved wrong. According to him, "any visitor to Vai country today can easily see that, far from being forgotten, the script is flourishing and in constant use, primarily in correspondence but also in other interesting ways, quite apart from the scrutiny of foreign linguists."<sup>47</sup>

The popularity of the script among the Vai was partly patriotic, but also partly because, to quote another scholar, of "the facility with which a hitherto uneducated native will learn to read and write in it. It will take only a fraction of the time that it takes to learn to read with an alphabet".<sup>48</sup> Indeed a recent study based on Vai literacy has established important and often quoted theses which qualify drastically the conventional theories about

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<sup>47</sup> "Notes on the Present-Day Usage of the VAI Script", *African Language Review* 6 (1967): 71-74.

<sup>48</sup> F.N. Migeod, *The Languages of West Africa*, Vol. II (London, 1913), p. 274. Quoted in Gail Stewart, p. 71.

literacy. 49

It is now left to history to establish whether the Nwagu Aneke script is going to be wiped off the face of literacy, after the immense efforts we are going to put into it, by the more predominant Roman alphabet. Or whether it will survive and grow, serving purposes alternative to and complementary with our life with the foreign and useful modern alphabetic Roman script.

#### D. THE MESSAGE

Nwagu Aneke believes that the script he was given is not something to be trifled with for mere curiosity. He was given it because of the urgent responsibility of restoring the world to a proper sense of reality and morality, and thereby reconnecting human beings <sup>with deities</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>gods</sup> spirits, with the animals, trees, grasses and all the elements of nature that are part of our world. The essentiality of this reconnection is that human beings have progressed from the maltreatment of other categories of beings to the insensitive maltreatment of other human beings which has now made man an object of fear to man, beast and even spirits. But it is from the big and multifarious spirit world that the bad spirits are using human beings to do these terrible things in the world. And so Nwagu Aneke's messages are messages of re-integration.

After this introductory chapter, I will leave the reader to extract the details of the message of Nwagu Aneke in this book which presents a fair sampling of his writings. Let me explain however the principle of the organization of the material and also discuss briefly some other issues related to the nature of the messages and their source, how Nwagu Aneke sees himself with regard to the responsibility of preserving and disseminating the messages, and what relevance the messages, especially the prophesies, have when ~~one~~ considers them in terms of their fulfillment or non-fulfillment.

I will be writing about "Nwagu Aneke's insistence that ...", "Nwagu Aneke discusses ...", "Nwagu Aneke's statements indicate that ..." but I must now point out that these phrases are in ~~our~~ <sup>the</sup> standard <sup>convention</sup> manner of attributing thoughts and ideas to the recognized author of a book. That is not the language of Nwagu Aneke. For him, the material presented in this book has its own autonomy. Indeed, his belief in the external source of the messages is so firmly and subconsciously held that when he is starting to read a passage he usually prefixes it with "Ọ sị na ..", that is ~~that~~ <sup>what</sup> "It says here that ...", or "This one says that ...".

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49 Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1981). The importance of this study is reflected, for example, in its use in George Sampson, *Writing Systems*, p. 15, and Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 388-89.



For Nwagu Aneke, ndi mmọ, the community of ancestral and non-ancestral spirit beings, are the source of the messages. Everything comes from the clouds <sup>asked</sup> but all things are carried in the wind and come to our lives and senses through the air we breathe and the breeze that strikes our bodies or the great <sup>storm</sup> winds that break and bend our environment. The spirit beings bring these messages at their own discretion and cannot be forced.

In the interview of 28th June, 1988, I asked Nwagu Aneke, after he had read the passage in Chapter 18, which he prefers to call by the name MAMSER, how his ideas come to him, what provokes him to make particular statements, what motive prompts him to put pen to paper. His illuminating reply was

Qqrogbu ovu bata, ovu mmọ gwali gi? Nqọ nkute ka ọ na-ekute.  
Ovu baa mụ n'ime, aluvị ya... Ovu bịa, anyị e ne-edede.

#### Translation

Is it not what comes in, what the spirits <sup>beings</sup> tell you? It is as it blows in with the <sup>wind</sup> breeze. Whatever enters into me I work on it. ... As it comes, so we write it down.

When I asked him what he meant by "As it comes .." - where was it that whatever it was was coming from, his reply was quick to come:

N'ikuku. N'ulukpu nwe unu ne-ene anya ka ive bu ive <sup>i</sup> nine bi ne-ene uwa nwa anyị bi anya. Mmọ avu ne-eche anyị bu n'ulukpu nwe ka o bi. Osisi je-epu n'ana nwa n'ulukpu ka o je-esi ja-abia. Avivia ...

#### Translation

From the wind. In these very clouds that we see above live all things there are, looking down at us who live on the earth. The spirit beings that watch over us live in the clouds. The trees that will grow on the ground, from the clouds will they come to germinate on the earth. The grass ...

Events may trigger off a particular statement. Chapter 18 was written after Nwagu Aneke had participated in a public enlightenment exercise in 1987 in connection with the Nigerian Federal Government social mobilization activity with the acronym, MAMSER. Chapter 7 was written during a time when Nwagu Aneke was engaged in a very emotionally disturbing land case with his people. Chapter 16 was written in August 1988 after a long conversation that Nwagu Aneke had with two friends, who visited him on the 30th of August 1988, following their reading of a newspaper article which I had had

on 28th August 1988

published on his work<sup>50</sup>

But the statement is neither a story of, nor a direct comment on the event. For example, in connection with the MAMSER statement, he was asked whether the statement he has in the book was what he wrote and read to the people at the rally. His answer showed that the passage came independently when he had gone home:

Nkea biazili n'unọ. M wee luzie unọ e wee ve gwa mu ka uwa mali na MAMSER bu ive mili emi, na ive o bu abia erike, nọọ sọ ndi vuly ive o na-ebu abia mbu bu sọ ndi ocha, ma isi ojii ekero vu ya izizi. Ma kita na o vetewo n'isi ojii. Si na akaa avu ka o veteli n'isi ojii. M wee delie avuvu di ya na olili di ya. Nyaa nke nwe m bialị guolu unu.

#### Translation

No, this came in the house. I reached home and they came and told me, so that the world would understand that Social Mobilization is a deep matter, that it comes with immense challenges, that it is only the white people who had seen its implications before now and that the black people had never seen it before. But now it has moved over to the black people. From last year it moved over to the black people. So I had to write out in detail the sufferings that come with it and the benefits that accompany it. That is the passage that I have read to you.

In this vein, Nwagu Aneke has written about a great variety of issues. But let me go back now to the principle of organization of this book. A chronological pattern could have been followed, in order to give an idea of the growth of Nwagu Aneke's mind. In the last ten years he has been writing the date of his passages in his own calculation, using both the Igbo method and the English method.<sup>51</sup> But even before he started writing the date of each passage in the passage itself it is still possible to recognize the sequence of texts from the appearance of the script. As blindness approached, and in reaction to the needs of easy reading for radio or a public audience, later writings were more spaced out than the earliest ones. It would therefore have been possible to follow a chronological order in presenting the

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<sup>50</sup>. My article, "Nwagu Aneke: Scriptures of an Igbo Visionary" appeared as the centre spread article with Nwagu Aneke's photograph in the *Sunday Statesman*, Owerri, 28th August, 1988.

<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, there is not a day that passes that he does not write a calendar, using two big exercise books. His explanation is that he keeps the two records so that if anything should happen to one he would still have the other to refer to.



material.

Nwagụ Aneke's statements have had such remarkable consistency however that the chronological method would not be very useful. Moreover, over the long period during which he was not recognized, he developed the habit of rewriting and reworking some of his major statements. For example, I have seen five versions of each of the statements that constitute chapters 2 and 10. These were his most favoured passages and whenever he was going for a radio performance, or he was coming to me in Nsukka in 1983, or he was going before an audience at a festival, he would rewrite the passage, changing the prefatory statements to suit the new audience.

I have therefore grouped the selected passages according to their central themes. This does not mean that there is no overlapping of topics. Sometimes, in the coordinated manner in which he presents his world view, several issues come together to be commented upon in the pursuit of each central theme. But it has still been possible to artificially organize the material into the clusters that constitute the sections of this book.

After this Introduction, the first body section is SECTION B which has only one chapter. It contains Nwagụ Aneke's own story of why and how the script and the message came to him. I have already discussed various issues related to this story of inspiration. Let me comment here on the translation of the trinity of moral injunctions which has some centrality in the writings of Nwagụ Aneke. The three arms of the trinity relate to speech, action and behaviour.

It is important to take special cognizance of the value of the word *ezi* used in Igbo as the qualification of those three aspects of life. Nwagụ Aneke writes

*Kwuvenị ezi okwu, luvani ezi ọlụ, meveni ezi omume.*

The immediate impulse is to translate these expressions into their approximate equivalences in English which would give us

**Speak the truth, do good deeds, behave well.**

Whereas these words would generally represent the intention of Nwagụ Aneke, they configure a thought system that is not Nwagụ Aneke's.

At the centre of the thought system to which Nwagụ is giving expression is the general applicability of the word *ezi* over several areas of activity. *Ezi* includes in itself all the concepts that translate into good, true, real, genuine, and describes the object to which it is attributed as fulfilling the ontological implications of the object-concept. Addressing a man as *ezinwoko* would then mean that the man fulfills the ideals that make up the concept of man, and these are ideals that involve not just moral or physical attributes but the personality and psychic attributes which the people have in mind when they use the concept. Real man, true man, good man, strong man, wealthy man, initiated man, married man, titled man, etc. could all be used to



translate the word <sup>#</sup>ezi<sup>52</sup>nwoko depending on context. Used then in their abstraction, the actions, statements, and behaviour to which ezi is attached have to be seen in this more complex sense. The translation has to call attention to this wider meaning.

It will be noticed also by anybody who knows the Igbo language that there is such a very close resemblance between "ilụ ezi ọlụ" and "ime ezi omume" <sup>#</sup>that, ordinarily, one would have been tempted to translate both of them as "do good". But Nwagụ Aneke's regular usage of them in juxtaposition makes one take notice of the fact that whereas one clause has to do with the nature of one's reaction to a given situation, the other has the more dynamic implication of positive generation of action to improve things, to add value and enhance reality. <sup>53</sup>

To try and accommodate all these implications of the Nwagụ Aneke trilogy of injunctions, I would have preferred to adopt the tortuous but more <sup>94</sup>balanced phraseology in the translation as "Speak words that are true to fact, do deeds that improve the world, behave in line with life". To avoid the infelicity of these tortuous phrases appearing so often in the text, I will use the early quick phrases, hoping that the reader will bear the above statements about the full meaning of the expressions in mind.

SECTION C contains the various passages in which Nwagụ Aneke's emphasis is on how the range of groups from the people of Umuleri, to the people of Anambra State, to the Igbo people, to the people of Nigeria, to the whole black races, used to organize their affairs, what they knew about their environment of trees and animals, their relationships with and between their ndị mmọ and their alụsị, the management of social, judicial, ritual and other relationships and processes, etc.

Here is to be found some of the theology of the part of Igboland to which Nwagụ Aneke belongs, that is, the Anambra Local Government Area of Anambra State. I limit the applicability of the theology to this location with the tentativeness of a scholar. But I do also have the enthusiasm of a discoverer and speculate that this is the first time that African theology has been written by somebody who has not only not had the distraction of international University studies, and also not even the school system and the thought patterns it imposes, but also not had the added distraction of an alien orthography and the distortions it introduces.

Indeed, there are issues on which it is easy to rush to conclusions as to how Nwagụ Aneke's statement supports some thesis or other, only for a

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<sup>52</sup>. I have discussed this concept more extensively in my 1984 *Ahiajoku Lecture: NKA NA NZERE*, (Owerri: Ministry of Information, 1984), pp. 18ff.

<sup>53</sup>. I am grateful to Professor Judith Ramaley of the University of Kansas, Lawrence, who highlighted this aspect in a conversation on Nwagụ Aneke's message.



later statement to throw a completely opposite picture on the matter. This is illuminating with regard to how scholars take interview reports to support their theses, only this time the interviewee happens to have written down his answers in copious volumes over a long period of time. It should be possible therefore to take his statement as a whole, rather than in parts that interest the "scholar".

SECTION D holds a selection from the many passages in which Nwagụ Aneke is insistent that many of the problems of truth and justice, of our disregard of our ancestors, came with the Christian institutions and their teachings. He has several passages in which he says this vigorously. This approach has its basis in the central perspective of Nwagụ Aneke on religion. His interest has to do with practice rather than belief, with morality rather than theology. He himself is not proposing any deity or spirit for anybody else's worship. The trinity of moral injunctions is pleasing to Chukwu and to the alusi and to ndị mmọ and will lead to benefits for those who practice them. But the "following" of spirit beings has to be seen as the precarious thing that it is because there is a multiplicity of ndị mmọ and quite often the ones we follow thinking that they are good are really bad spirits. The validity of any religion is in the practices emanating from the practitioners.

On the basis of this preference for action, Nwagụ Aneke makes very vigorous strictures against Christians and the image they have presented of themselves and their Christ. The Jews come into the picture because of the claim that Christ, who was born a Jew, is God, the son of a God who is without habitation and home base on earth. One is jolted by the crudity of some of the images with which Nwagụ Aneke ridicules some of the theological tenets, especially with regard to the eschatology, of Christian doctrine. One has however to take the whole picture for a clear understanding and react in one's own way. What I present here is a scheme of knowledge, not a set of doctrines.

During one of his interviews, Nwagụ Aneke spoke in words that explained the violence with which he reacted to the influence of external religion on our people. This interview was video-taped and there were colleagues from different disciplines to question him and participate in the discussions. Some who were particularly offended by his apparently anti-Christian statements had held him to long debate about the viability of his ideas and had tried to establish that the prophecies that were contained in some of his timed statements had not come true.

He had his answers to these specific issues, but over the general tendency of denial of his direction he had this to say:

Ive gbulu anyị bụ maka na abịa ne-ekwu ye, e ne-ekwu ye n'enu enu. Tupu ndị ọcha abịa be anyị, nọọ mmadi ka ekwudeli ve, na ọ bụrọ osisi. Ọ bụrọ ọcha gwali anyị na i dulu ovu nwanyị we бага n'ụnọ, na unu lu mekọọ e wee muo nwa, nọọ Chukwu. Ka Chukwu

ji zia<sup>ye</sup> anyi<sup>ka</sup> / o<sup>je</sup> wee zikokwu ve. M wee na-ayọ Igbo anyi ka anyi sove  
mmo avu kuzili anyi. Maka tupu ocha abata be anyi, mmadi ebuwo  
n'oji. O buro osisi ka ekwudeli ve. Nno mmadi ka va kwudeli.

This translates into the following statement:

What destroys us when we speak of these matters is that most often we stay on the surface of things. When the white people came here, it was people that they met, it was not trees. It is not the white people that told us that if a man takes a woman into a room and they have intercourse the result will be a child, it was God. In the same way that God told us things, he told them things. My plea to my fellow black people is that we should follow the spirit that has always taught us. Because, before the white people came to our land, people had lived in the black world. It ~~is~~<sup>was</sup> not trees that the white people met when they came here. It was people that they met.

SECTION E contains Nwagu Aneke's statements on the management of contemporary affairs and the political and social scene as seen from the eyes of a pure traditionalist. Here he goes beyond himself to write about events at higher levels of political activity than one would expect a villager to engage in. This area contains material he was afraid to expose since he was afraid of what the big power-managing people would do to him. But it is part of what he has written and, as he writes in one of the chapters, I did insist that he give the messages as he had received them. Here also he is overwhelmed by events to the pitch where his writings are full of prophecy, and tend to become apocalyptic of impending doom.

Two things strike me as significant here. One is Nwagu's sense of the purpose<sup>of</sup> power being the welfare of the people in the community. The other is his insistence that the choice of ruler is a matter not for contest but for selection processes that reveal for whom power was intended. The introduction of contest and conflict and multiple rulership of the same people in the deepest villages, in local and national boundaries, in the world, is against natural order. The consequences are military rule, famine, drought, wickedness, and the fire that will destroy the world.

The alternative is that the spirits will again take back the power which they have given to people, and hand it to one person who now represents them on earth. But will the people recognize the agent of ndi mmo?

Clearly some of the visions of Nwagu Aneke here are apocalyptic and he makes categorical statements about what will happen in the year of his writing. These years have passed and these events do not appear to have taken place. In 1985, for example, in a passage in Chapter 23, he talks of the transition of power from the white man to the black races which would take place that year. In 1987, in passages in Chapter 17, he again insists on this movement of power as going to take place in 1987 and describes the catastrophes that will befall the world in the process of transition. The white man is still in charge of the world, and have the catastrophes taken place?



One needs to be careful here in the interpretation of statement and the appreciation of events. When I read the 1987 vision to a group in Nsukka, one of the listeners immediately thought of a newspaper report about a recent event in Awgu, a town not too far from Enugu, the capital of Anambra State.

A family had gone to sleep at night. When the parents heard the sound of scuffling in the room occupied by their two sons, the father tried to open the door and found it was locked from inside. The man shouted for his neighbours. By the time they pushed open the door, the head of the younger brother was lying on the ground having been severed from the neck by his older brother. The boy said that it was something the spirits had been asking him to do for some time and he had resisted as long as he could but he had now done what the spirits asked him to do. To what profit to himself? This was not a consideration. The spirits pushed him to it.<sup>54</sup> To <sup>e</sup>that extent that such things are happening, there is evidence of the violence and hunger that Nwagu Aneke's visions threatened. But are they of enough vastness to justify the apocalyptic vigour of the statement?

Nwagu Aneke himself believes that the things he said would happen have been happening only that most people are not disposed to see them. The clue he gives in the 1987 statement is that the world could be destroyed and people will carry on as if nothing has happened - dead people walking about in a dead world. Moreover, when it is said that the world will be destroyed, it is not everybody and everything in the world that will be destroyed. As he said in a June 1988 interview:

Nyaa na abia, nke nwe anyi nwa ee? Ive a a na-aga na-asị gi na oku ya-agba, e doo chee nọọ ọra niine ka ọ ya-agba. Ọ bụro uwa niine. Na mbosi oku ya-agba uwa ive nwe ọ ya-agba va, ee? na i bụlu onye Chukwu vulu n'anya, ọ gbalị bịa lue gi bụ oku avu, ọ di ka mmadi na-adọọ n'aziwata. I gaveli onwe gi. Ọsọ ya nya bụlu na i yikosi eve, i ya ebu ye ga. Ma aru aka onye a cholu ka ọ gbalie, o zu ya n'ezi, o lelie nya.

Nyaa, onye ni si gi, "ee oku ya-agba, ọ gbaa ọra", Ntu! Ọ boro ọra ka ọ ya agba. Nọọ onye ava ya di na ọ ya-agba ka ọ ya-agba. Onye ava ya na-adirọ ya, ọ ya-agbarọ ya. Ive avu e ji ekwu ka e mee ezigbo ive ka e mee ezigbo ive, ma mmadi aha-anuro ya. ... Nyaa na ive bu ive nine mmadi n'eme bu ovu onye meteli, ovu ya ka ọ bu. Nya ka eji asị ka ana eme ezigbo ive. Ọ boro m n'agwa akwukwo? Ejeli m akwukwo? Ka I wee wota ive m n'agwa gi.

#### Translation

*Therefore, when we get to the point,*

*as we are here now, when it is said that fire will burn, some people presume that*

35  
54. I am grateful to Mrs. Patience Nwankwo for this reference.

that it is everybody in the world that will burn in the fire. But it is not ~~the~~ <sup>whole world</sup> everybody. On the day that this terrible fire will burn the world, if you are one loved by God, the fire will burn to where you are and you will be as if you are sitting in a bowl of iced water and you will pass it by without bother. Even if you have all manner of clothing on your body, the cloth will not catch fire. But when the fire reaches somebody that is to be burnt up, if it meets him on the road, it will burn him up.

So if anybody <sup>that person on that</sup> says to you ~~that~~ "Yes, when the fire will burn it will burn everybody", <sup>he is telling</sup> that is a lie. It is those whose names are there for the burning that will be burnt. If one's name is not there, that one will not be burnt. That is why I have insisted that people do things in line with life, because it is as people behave that their names will be for life or for destruction. That is why I say that people should behave true to life. For here I am reading to you and did I ever go to school? This is so that you will understand what I have said to you.

That people don't  
create behavior but  
no one is listening to  
what I am saying.

I am not sure that one is not caught in the trap of the king's new gown here - you pretend to be wise in order to see the dress that is not there. Whether the prophecies are being fulfilled or not is not a question that I would stake my scholarship on answering. But then this appears to be the tradition with prophets and prophecies and keeps the argument going between believers and non-believers.

What I have grouped together under SECTION F are some of the passages in which Nwagu Aneke discusses the pains of prophecy. They are passages in which he laments his situation and restates his intended role. His greatest pain would appear to be that the messages he came to deliver have not found audience among the people. Even the people closest to him, the people into whose community he was born, are the farthest from recognizing him and insult him in various ways. And so he seeks new community in those who listen to him.

To conclude this section, let me share with the reader two impressions that come strongly to me from the writings. One of the ideas that strikes me as very significant in the message of Nwagu Aneke is the recognition of the MULTIPLICITY of reality, the varieties that were programmed into the existence of the world, and the essential importance of each being, or group of beings, to manage their difference in the world so that they are fulfilled in the process of providing that contribution which <sup>was</sup> meant to come from that difference. A random selection of some of these differences relate to the multiplicity of human gifts, some good, some bad, and the senselessness of people struggling to be what other people are instead of what they are themselves.

There is a multiplicity of Chukwu according to the multiplicity of beings, for it is each being's Chukwu that keeps that being alive and determines the limits of stature and achievement and will lead the being away in death. There is a multiplicity of religions, for to each people there are the deities of the land through whom they find out in divination what has happened and is



to happen. It is at the shrine of their alusi that each people cleanse themselves individually and in groups when there have been abominations committed. It is by swearing with their deities that each people achieve truth-saying among their people.

The multiplicity of people's colours is part of the variety of life and each people should find what they are meant to do and contribute their quota to the fullness of life. The spirits, ancestral and non-ancestral are many and varied, and some are benevolent and some vile and vicious and we have to be careful that we do not follow the bad thinking that we are following the good.

The accompanying idea is the reverse side of the coin of this multiplicity, and that is the concept of integration. All this multiplicity is like different strands that make up the unity of a very intricate design. Our world is a world in which all beings are part of the same reality in which man, animal, plant and stone, air and water and all that exist interact, in which man is perhaps the one that is out of stride with the movement of the rest of being.

Nwagụ Aneke reiterates his trinity of injunctions as part of the programme of reintegration. He recommends that human beings go back to the traditions of their own people, the tradition which put them in rapport with their own environment, with the good spirit beings and deities of their land. He suggests that the speed with which the Igbo people followed modernity has something to do with the failure of the Igbo people to rediscover their pristine connection with God, the source of their effectiveness. He charges that most of those touting the Bible are merely in search of money and group benefits. He thinks that everything in the environment has been made to interact with everything else in the environment. Animals and plants can talk with human beings and can mutually trust one another and go into pacts of mutual assistance.

#### E. CONCLUSION.

At the end of his survey of the indigenous scripts of West Africa and Surinam, David Dalby regretted the wastage of creativity involved in the invention and the lack of continued use and development of the scripts:

It is sad, however, that so much effort on the part of the inventors should have been in vain, and that all but two of their scripts should have failed to take root: their outstanding achievement would seem to mark not the beginning of indigenous graphic symbolism in West Africa and Surinam, but the end.

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9. "The Indigenous Scripts of West Africa and Surinam: Their Inspiration and Design, *African Language Studies*, IX (1968): 197

Several reasons may be suggested to explain this phenomenon. Perhaps these inventors were merely interested in finding a writing medium for their languages and had really nothing of interest to communicate to their readers; perhaps the study of these scripts has been the exclusive preserve of European linguists and anthropologists whose only interest in the scripts have been scholarly and evolutionary - the study of what happened with less developed scripts on the way to the alphabetic script which has been generally agreed to be the superior and international and universal form of script for written communication. Attention has been haphazard by Africans who have never really felt the urge to have some form of communication of their own, who have swallowed the neo-colonial bait of universality and technological need for uniformity, not realizing that they will be perpetual followers, imitators and slaves as long as they are swallows of what others have produced and have nothing of their own product to give to the world.

Here is our chance. Nwagu Aneke came on his own, unbidden, and has been pushed at us by our ancestral and non-ancestral spirits with a message that we start to look again at ourselves, at our origins, at our social and political structures, at our languages and cultures, at our technologies and knowledge, at our economic and religious systems, at how we relate with the whole world around us - the world of man and spirits, the world of animals and plants, the world of terrestrial and extra-terrestrial phenomena.

In the varied fields of assignments that the world needs for its survival, every people must recognize what role they have been given to play. No people must perpetually run after the assignment given to others to ape them and be the laughing stock of the world and the source of failure for the happiness of the world. For the world will become fully happy when it is balanced, not now that it is already tilted dangerously too much to one direction under the greedy self promotion of one civilization.

It is possible to take the message and leave the script medium. This is why the transcriptions and the translations have been provided. But the script also has its own validity as an invention and the next stage in our development of the Nwagu Aneke phenomenon will be the provision of manuals and primers with which the script and the language can be studied. Then it will be ultimately possible for those whose interest has been adequately provoked by this work to go independently and more fully into the writings of Ogbuevi Nwagu Aneke.

~~U. OBZOR: A Bulgarian Quarterly Review of Literature and Arts 77 (1986): 81.~~